

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

**Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests**



# Highway 12: A Long and Winding Road



Experience the natural beauty and history of the  
Lewis and Clark Highway in Idaho.

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# *Wild and Scenic Passageway*

**F**or thousands of years water has carved its path, gradually creating a narrow canyon, increasing in volume and becoming a river.

U.S. Highway 12 now parallels that river, the Lochsa. The canyon remains much the same as it has been through the centuries—narrow, rugged, the river lined by evergreen trees and rock outcroppings.

Over the millenia the Nez Perce people (Nimiipuu) lived, hunted, gathered roots, camped and fished here. They traveled across the ridgeline route north of the highway to hunt buffalo.



*At Lowell the Lochsa River joins the Selway River, and the two become one. The canyon begins to widen, and the Middle Fork of the Clearwater River seems to slow down.*

## *On the Wild Side*

### **Wild and Scenic Rivers**

The Lochsa, Selway and Middle Fork of the Clearwater top the long list of rivers identified in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act passed by Congress in 1968. All are designated components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Rivers designated wild and scenic "possess outstandingly remarkable scenic. . . geologic. . . historic. . . or other similar values." They are to be "preserved in free-flowing condition, and. . . protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations."

# Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness

The Wilderness Act of 1964 describes a wilderness as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

Much of what you see across the river as you travel along Highway 12 is the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, the third largest wilderness in the lower 48 United States. It covers an area of nearly 1.5 million acres—slightly larger than the state of Delaware.

## Wildlife, Fish, Plants

Many creatures great and small live in the river canyon.

Deer, elk and black bear move along the hillsides. Moose graze in meadows and wet areas. Canada geese, swans, eagles, osprey and great blue herons reside along the river's banks and swim on its waters. At lower elevations wild turkeys thrive. Mountain lions, snow geese and Harlequin ducks make a rare appearance.



*An angler wets a line in the Lochsa River. Across the way, the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness begins at the river's edge.*

The Lochsa and Middle Fork of the Clearwater Rivers provide habitat for many fish species. If you look closely enough, you may see fish "holding" in the water among moss-covered rocks.

Plant life in the river canyon ranges from giant cedar trees to tiny buttercups. You can even find "coastal disjunct" plants, remnants from a time long ago when a temperate climate prevailed.



*Meriwether Lewis catalogued and described syringa in 1806. Idaho's state flower, it bursts into bloom in early summer, its white blossoms smelling like an orange tree in bloom.*

# *Information and Points of Interest*

*The following sites are listed west to east, from Orofino to Lolo Pass. Most sites are identified on the map. (Note: Hours of operation and services provided are subject to change.)*

## **Canoe Camp**

At this Nez Perce National Historical Park site Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery made canoes in 1805. The site features historical information and a parklike setting for a picnic.

## **North Fork Ranger Station**

In Orofino stop by to view exhibits, browse the books and other items for sale and ask the friendly staff for help with your trip plans.

## **Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests**

The Supervisor's Office is in Kamiah along Hwy 12. The staff can answer questions about visitor attractions in the area.

## **Kamiah City Park**

Before you cross the bridge, turn right into the city park. You'll find picnic tables, restrooms and shady areas to rest along the river. There are also signs about the Nez Perce Indians and the Lewis and Clark Expedition.



*At this Nez Perce National Historical Park site you'll find a rest stop, picnic area and interpretation of the Nez Perce Heart of the Monster legend.*

## **Heart of the Monster**

A volcanic rock formation east of Kamiah represents the heart of the monster from which, according to Nez Perce legend, the Nimiipuu originated.

## **Kooskia Crossing**

Once a major crossing point for loggers and miners, and the base of a grain and freight tramway to the Camas Prairie, this site now offers recreation information for travelers and a weigh station for the Idaho Transportation Department.

## **Kooskia Ranger Station**

Turn off Highway 12 onto the bridge which crosses the Middle Fork of the Clearwater River. Here the South Fork joins the Middle Fork to form the Clearwater River. Turn left to the ranger station.

## ***Lochsa Historical Ranger Station***

Visit an old-time ranger station and take a self-guided tour around the grounds. Stop by to talk with the Forest Service retirees who staff the station. They love to share their stories of what life was like at remote stations years ago. The station is open seven days a week, Memorial Day through Labor Day.

### ***Colgate Licks***

Named for George Colgate, cook for the ill-fated Carlin hunting party who died here in 1893; and for natural mineral deposits or "licks," the site has a ½-mile National Recreation Trail. As you walk along, you'll pass by cedar snags, charred from fires that swept the area decades ago.

### ***Wendover***

You'll find Lewis and Clark information near Wendover Campground. At this stop you'll be about where Lewis and Clark began their climb from the river canyon to the ridge (the Lolo Trail) on their journey west in 1805.

### ***Powell Ranger Station***

Turn off Highway 12 at the junction to Powell Ranger Station. Here you'll find a campground and a rustic resort providing tourist services.



*A pack string is loaded and ready for work at the Lochsa Ranger Station in the 1930s.*

### ***Lolo Pass Visitor Center and Rest Area***

Stop by the new Lolo Pass Visitor Center near the Idaho-Montana state line and follow the journey of Lewis and Clark through the interpretive exhibits on display.

Outdoors, hike the ¼-mile meadow interpretive trail, which begins near the visitor center and loops back to it. Just follow the signs.

Contact the Powell Ranger Station for visitor center hours of operation.

### ***The Montana Side***

Once you cross the state line, you'll find more places to camp and sights to see as you travel east on Highway 12.

For more information, contact the Lolo National Forest (see back page) and refer to the center map for campground locations.



# Camping and Picnicking



*The Middle Fork of the Clearwater River flows by as a visitor enjoys lunch in the shade. Enjoy your stay at any one of the picnic areas or campgrounds along Highway 12.*

## Public Campgrounds and Picnic Areas

Most Forest Service campgrounds east of Kooskia along Highway 12 open by Memorial Day weekend and remain open through Labor Day or longer. You may stay in one location 14 days.



## Undeveloped Campsites

You can camp outside developed campgrounds. Follow these few guidelines to select your campsite.

- Use an existing campsite at least 200 feet from water.
- Avoid trampling streambanks.
- Consider your neighbors. Pitch your camp well away from others.
- Always pack out litter.
- Carry a shovel and a bucket during fire season, May 10 through October 20.
- Leave no trace of your visit.



If you have questions about camping regulations outside developed areas, stop by any ranger station for information.

# Things to Do

## River Floating

The Lochsa River whitewater rafting and kayaking season begins in April and usually runs through June. You can take a day or an overnight trip with a commercial outfitter, or you can ride the whitewater on your own (technical expertise a must).

You'll find several developed river access points with parking along Highway 12.

### River Access Site Mile Marker

◆ <i>Knife Edge</i>	107
◆ <i>Split Creek</i>	111
◆ <i>Fish Creek</i>	119
◆ <i>Nine Mile</i>	130
◆ <i>White Pine</i>	138

You do not need a permit to raft or kayak the Lochsa. For your free brochure showing rapids locations and ratings, contact the Kooskia Ranger Station.



*Kayaker on the Lochsa River works to turn the craft in swift water.*

## Swimming

Hot summer days and swimming go together. While you'll find no designated swimming holes in the Wild and Scenic Rivers canyon, you will see a few likely places to pull over and take a cooling dip.

The Middle Fork of the Clearwater River is wider and smoother than the Lochsa, but both rivers can be dangerous. In some places a strong current runs just under the water's surface. Be careful, and watch over your children and pets.

## Fishing and Hunting

If you enjoy fishing or hunting, you've come to the right place. Cutthroat and rainbow trout, chinook salmon and steelhead swim in the clear waters. Elk, deer, moose, bear, cougar and mountain goats make the steep canyon country their home.

Fishing or hunting, you'll find the challenge you're after in a rugged and primitive landscape.

Check the Idaho Department of Fish and Game regulations booklets for answers to your hunting and fishing questions. Look for the department's address and phone number on the back of this brochure.

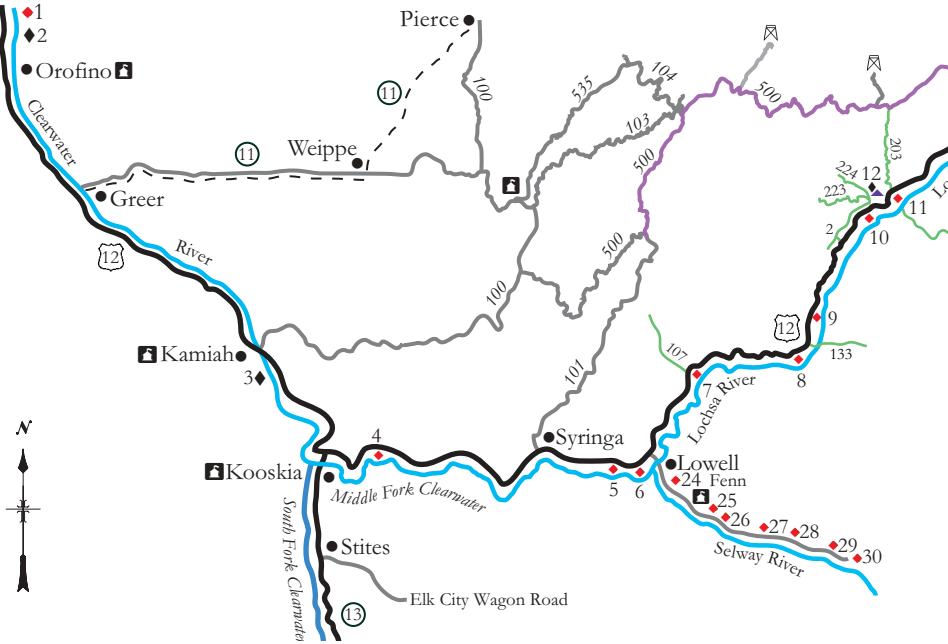
	Recreation Site	Units	Picnic	Water	Toilet	Fee
1	Pink House Hole	18	●	●	●	●
2	Canoe Camp		●		●	
3	Heart of the Monster		●	●	●	
4	Tukaytespe' PA		●	●		
5	Three Devils PA		●	●	●	
6	Wild Goose CG	6	●	●	●	●
7	Apgar Creek CG	7	●	●	●	●
8	Knife Edge RA	4	●		●	
9	Split Creek RA				●	
10	Fish Creek RA		●			
11	Wilderness Gateway CG	91	●	●	●	●
12	Lochsa Historical Ranger Station					
13	Nine Mile RA		●			
14	White Pine RA					
15	Colgate Licks Trail				●	
16	Jerry Johnson CG	15	●	●	●	●
17	Wendover CG	27	●	●	●	●
18	Whitehouse CG	13	●	●	●	●
19	Powell CG	39	●	●	●	●
20	White Sand CG	6	●	●	●	●

CG = Campground    PA = Picnic Area    RA = River Access

	Recreation Site
21	Devoto Grove PA
22	Lee Creek CG
23	Lewis and Clark CG
24	Johnson Bar CG
25	O'Hara Bar CG
26	Rackliff CG
27	Boyd Creek CG
28	Glover CG
29	Gedney Creek CG
30	Selway Falls CG

CG = Campground

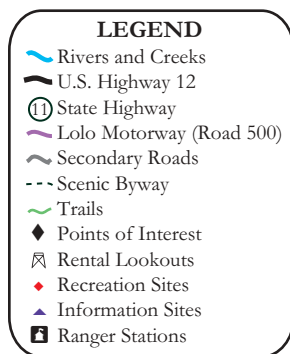
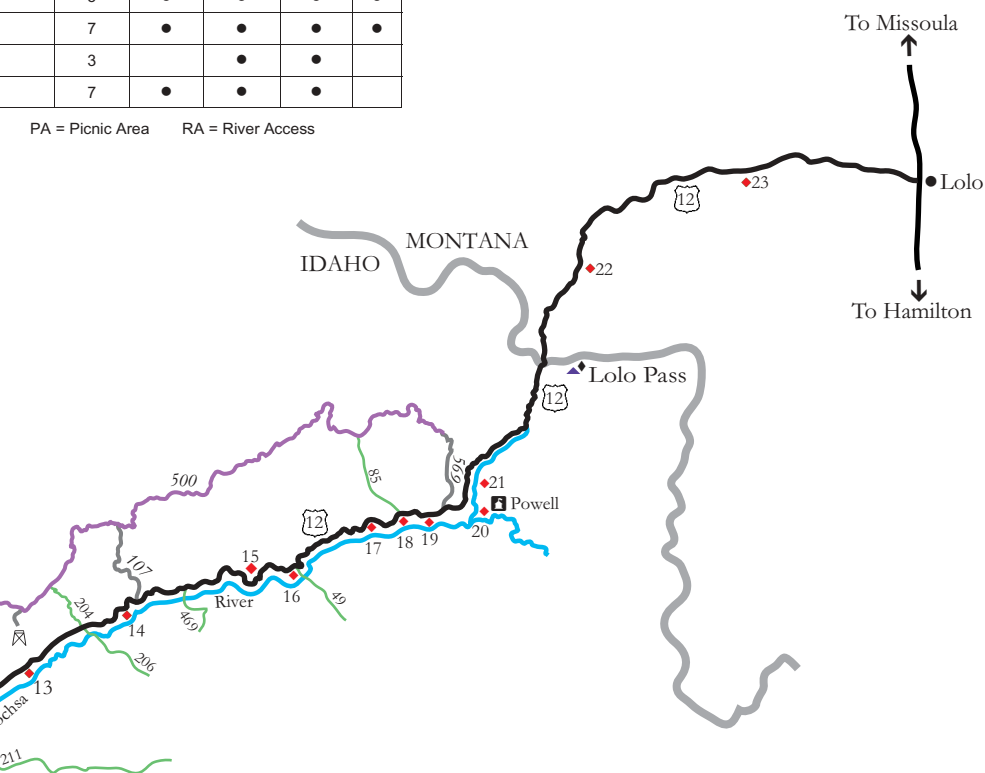
← To Lewiston





	Units	Picnic	Water	Toilet	Fee
		●	●	●	
	22	●	●	●	●
	17	●	●	●	●
	7			●	
	34	●	●	●	●
	6	●	●	●	●
	5	●	●	●	●
	7	●	●	●	●
	3		●	●	
	7	●	●	●	

PA = Picnic Area      RA = River Access



*The river canyon is rich in history, with archaeological and historic sites. People, stock animals and vehicles can damage the land. Please travel and camp only where permitted. Make no new trails. Enjoy your stay, but take only photographs and memories with you.*

*Sites and artifacts on public lands are protected by federal law. If you discover such remains, please leave them undisturbed. Report discoveries or violations of the law to Forest Service personnel. Violators will be fined \$200 to \$5000 for disturbing sites or artifacts.*

# Side Tripping by Road



*Fenn Ranger Station looks out on the Selway River from its site five miles south of Highway 12. Turn off the highway at Lowell to visit the station, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.*

## History Trips

### Selway River Road

At Lowell, you can cross the bridge and get on Selway River Road. You can travel 20 miles to road's end.

Along the road you'll find campgrounds, picnic and swimming areas, trailheads and the historic Fenn Ranger Station. Stop by the ranger station for information and to look at this piece of history built in the late 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

*Note: Gravel and dirt roads leading off the main highway can be treacherous. Many are unsuitable for highway vehicles. Refer to Forest Service maps for more information before you decide to explore these routes. You can buy maps at most area ranger stations.*

### Gold Rush Historic Byway

You can cross the Clearwater River at Greer, 7 miles east of Orofino, to follow the Gold Rush Historic Byway (State Highway 11). You'll pass through rolling fields of grain and grasses on your way to Weippe. There the Niimipuu fed starving members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805.

Keep traveling, and you enter forests on your way to Pierce, 10 miles distant. Miners discovered gold near Pierce in the 1860s. Remnants of history remain—old buildings, a logging museum and a collection of artifacts from Chinese miners (on display in the city library.) Travel another 12 miles north to Headquarters, once a bustling company lumber town. You've reached the end of the byway.

## Lolo Motorway

The Lolo Motorway is narrow, a one-lane road with nothing more than what nature supplies as a surface. Some stretches hold big rocks that can scrape the underside of a low-clearance vehicle. It's best to drive a tough vehicle with high clearance and good tires. Towing trailers or driving RVs or motor homes on many stretches of the motorway is not advised.

The high elevation route is open and free of snow generally from July through September.

In the 1930s the Lolo Motorway replaced historic paths that traversed the ridges west of the Bitterroot Divide. The route the motorway follows once bore the footprints of early Indians. The Lewis and Clark Expedition also struggled along these same ridges in 1805 and again in 1806. In the 1860s the Bird-Truax Trail was surveyed and constructed along the ridge line.



*Want to get away from it all? Consider renting a retired fire lookout tower or a rustic cabin. Call Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest offices for information.*

## Elk City Wagon Road

Cross the bridge into Kooskia and follow State Highway 13 to Harpster. A sign on the left marks the turnoff to reach the Elk City Wagon Road. Keep in mind: The Wagon Road is a one-lane, winding road with few turnouts. Please don't travel it in your RV. Overhanging branches and the sometimes rough road could damage your vehicle.

The historic route originated from the Southern Nez Perce Trail, a trail used by the Nimiipuu to travel from the Camas Prairie in Idaho to the Bitterroot Valley in Montana.

The first gold miners from Pierce used the trail on their way to explore the Elk City area in 1861. During the mining boom which followed, the trail became a thoroughfare and was modified for pack strings and wagons.

The Elk City Wagon Road was constructed in 1894-95, closely following the original trail.



# Side Tripping by Trail

## Day Hikes

You can stop along Highway 12 to take a hike or stretch your legs at several places. In most cases, you're hiking up and back on the same trail. The following suggested hiking trails are listed west to east. (Each is shown on the brochure map.)

- *Canyon Creek Trail 107*

Trailhead on the north side of Highway 12 across from Apgar Campground. Ferns and moss drape the rock wall on one side of this narrow canyon trail.

- *Fish Butte Trail 223 and Fish Creek Trail 224*

Just west of Lochsa Historical Ranger Station. Drive in ¼ mile to trailhead. Trail 223 leads to Fish Butte. Drive to road's end to pick up Trail 224 to Obia Cabin, 4 miles away.

- *Snowshoe Falls*

Section of Downriver Trail 2 just west of milepost 118. Initially it is a steep climb. Then the trail becomes gentle for the ¼-mile walk to the falls, a cool respite on hot summer days.

- *Powell Complex Trail 25*

Turn off at Powell Junction and enter Powell Campground. Park near the picnic area and follow the 1½-mile trail westward through cool, shady cedar and larch trees. Trail dead ends at highway.

## Trails to the Lolo Motorway

- *Sherman Creek Trail 203*

Trailhead on the north side of the highway across from Wilderness Gateway Campground. This 7.1-mile steep trail takes 5 hours to hike. Difficult for bike travel.

- *Skookum Creek Trail 204*

Trailhead on north side of highway across from Eagle Mountain pack bridge. Steep and narrow, this 5.5-mile trail takes 3 hours to hike. Unsafe for bike travel.

- *Wendover Trail 25*

Trailhead on north side of highway at milepost 153. Climb the 7-mile route followed by Lewis and Clark up Wendover Ridge to the Lolo Trail.

*For more hiking information, pick up your free trail guide at any Clearwater National Forest office.*



# Trails to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness

From Highway 12 cross the Lochsa River on pack bridges which lead to Wilderness trails (foot or stock traffic only on bridges and Wilderness trails). You'll find parking for stock trailers and access for stock at most trailheads.

- *Split Creek Ridge Trail 133*

Cross the Split Creek Pack Bridge at mile marker 111. Hike 5 hours to Louse Lake (11 miles). Spring at mile 3.

- *Boulder Creek Trail 211*

Get on this mainline trail from Wilderness Gateway Campground. You'll encounter steep side slopes and strings of pack animals the first 5 miles.

- *Eagle Mountain Trail 206*

Cross the pack bridge and follow Trail 206 for 2-3 miles through cool cedar groves. Trail mostly follows a rocky, rugged, high ridge.



*Trail 211 winds into the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness after crossing Boulder Creek.*



*Pack bridges cross the Lochsa River, providing hikers and stock users access to Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness trails.*

- *Mocus Point Trail 469*

Cross the Mocus Point Pack Bridge to access this 4.9-mile mainline trail. Trail offers a moderate-to-difficult hike as it passes through cedar and fir groves.

- *Warm Springs Trail 49*

Cross the Warm Springs Pack Bridge to get on Trail 49. It follows Warm Springs Creek through old-growth cedar, spruce, fir and lodgepole.



*Grand fir, also known as white fir, is one tree species you'll see along Warm Springs Trail 49.*

# Changing Landscapes

## **Fire**

Natural in the river canyon, fires often start from lightning strikes. They can spread fast on hot, dry days.

Fierce fires burned through the river canyon in 1910, 1919, 1929 and 1934.

You may experience the heat of the fire season if you're traveling in the summer, especially July and August. Smoke can hang in river canyons even from fires miles away.

## **Noxious Weeds**

Noxious weeds are spreading at the rate of 4600 acres each day. Seeds scatter when they lodge on ATVs or the tails and manes of stock animals, when the wind blows them to uninfested ground and when people pick "bouquets" then discard them.

These non-native plants are considered noxious because they force out native plants, destroying wildlife habitat. They suck essential nutrients and fungi from soil, harming watersheds and ecosystems. They can pose a health threat to humans and livestock.

## **Water and Landslides**

Gravity pulls patiently at the steep canyon walls. Watch out! Rocks can tumble onto the highway anytime but especially in late winter and early spring when snow melts, saturates the ground and loosens the earth—or when rain pounds the ground.

Runoff from winter snow leaves its mark on the land. Once in awhile melting snow, coupled with heavy rain, builds water volume so fast streams "blow out." You can see evidence of a recent blowout at milepost 124.7. In 1995 a "rain-on-snow event" put so much water and debris in Noseeum Creek that it scoured its own channel and took out a section of Highway 12.



*The "pretty purple flower" you see along Highway 12 is Spotted Knapweed. This noxious weed can cause liver and brain damage in horses. Spotted Knapweed continues its spread in the Wild and Scenic Rivers canyon. Please, do not pick ANY plant in the canyon.*



## ***Constructing Highway 12***

Construction of a highway through the Lochsa River canyon began in the early 1900s on both east and west ends. Work continued over the years until the highway opened in 1961.



*U.S. Highway 12, 1962*

## ***Rail Line Surveys***

In 1908 the Northern Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads began surveying a route along the Clearwater and Lochsa Rivers east to Lolo Pass and over the Bitterroot Divide into Montana. The Northern Pacific won the surveying race but never built the line.

What they did get was every other section of public land. Today from Powell to Lolo Pass that legacy lives. Landowner-ship skips from public to private, section by section, in a checker-board pattern.



## ***Hazards of the Road***

### ***Truck Traffic***

On Highway 12 truck traffic can be heavy, particularly when the wheat fields of Montana spill their bounty into trailers bound for westward ports. Be prepared, and expect a truck around the next blind curve.

### ***Slow Traffic***

Some people are unaccustomed to driving on winding mountain roads. Slow down, and be patient. Watch your speed. Take posted limits seriously.

### ***Rocks and Road Graders***

In late winter and early spring graders may be clearing the roadway of rocks and debris. Keep that in mind, and think ahead to what might be around the next bend.

### ***Road Crews***

Watch for flaggers slowing or stopping traffic for road work in the summer. In the winter give snow plows plenty of room.

### ***Wildlife***

At any time of year you will see wildlife near or even on the road. You may round a corner to meet an elk, a moose or a deer—a close encounter of the wrong kind.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

903 3rd Street

Kamiah, ID 83536

208-935-2513

[www.fs.usda.gov/nezperceclearwater](http://www.fs.usda.gov/nezperceclearwater)

### *North Fork Ranger District*

12730 Highway 12

Orofino, ID 83544

208-476-4541

### *Lochsa/Powell Ranger District*

502 Lowry Street

Kooskia, ID 83539

208-926-4274

### *Powell Ranger Station at*

### *Lolo Visitor Center*

21200 Highway 12

Lolo, MT 59847

208-942-3113

### **Lolo National Forest**

24 Fort Missoula Road

Missoula, MT 59804

406-329-3750

TDD 800-877-8339

[www.fs.usda.gov/lolo](http://www.fs.usda.gov/lolo)

### **Idaho Department of Fish & Game**

3316 16th Street

Lewiston, ID 83501

208-799-5010

[www.state.id.us/fishgame](http://www.state.id.us/fishgame)

### **Idaho Outfitters & Guides Association**

P.O. Box 95

Boise, ID 83701

208-342-1438

[www.ioga.org](http://www.ioga.org)

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